

CNMI ENAP Questions

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CNMI ENAP Questions from Congressman Sablan

What Are They Asking: As they continue to work on getting the pilot program extended in the next farm bill in Mariana Islands, they need an updated projection of how existing pilot funds are to be spent, together with the annual grant, going forward five years. Committee staff have indicated there are large balances of both pilot funds (\$18.4M) and last fiscal year's NAP grant (\$4.1M). The office wants more info on how the funds will exhaust in coming years and how, without a replenishment of the pilot, the income eligibility thresholds and benefit levels will necessarily begin to recede from the SNAP standard in Guam.

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This is correct. CNMI carried forward significant balances from FY 2017 into FY 2018 in both the Enhanced Nutritional Assistance Program (ENAP) Farm Bill grant as well as the base Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) grant.

- Of a total current ENAP grant of \$22 million, approximately \$18.4 million was carried forward into FY 2018. CNMI will receive an additional \$8.5 million in ENAP funds in FY 2018 bringing the total available balance to approximately \$27 million.
- At the beginning of FY 2018, \$4.1 million from the base CNMI grant of \$12.1 million carried forward from FY 2017. This number is significantly higher than usual and likely represents a cost allocation issue between the NAP and ENAP grants. FNS working with CNMI to address this issue and expects this balance will adjust downward to between \$1.5 million and \$2.0 million which is the typical level of carry over for the NAP.

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CNMI launched its ENAP in June of 2017. In simplest terms the enhancement involves raising income eligibility limits and increasing household benefit levels to serve more residents and provide more generous benefits. These changes are paired with administrative investments intended to improve the efficiency of the program; primarily a modern eligibility system and an electronic benefit transfer system.

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At the time of implementation, NAP participation had declined from FY 2015 and FY 2016 levels. It was anticipated that the changes in income eligibility guidelines and more generous benefits would attract a significant increase in participation once the ENAP was implemented. To date, these increases have not occurred. Participation climbed modestly in the late summer and fall of calendar year (CY) 2017. Early CY 2018 participation appears to have remained flat or declined slightly. At current participation levels total annual program expenditures will remain at or near the level of the base NAP grant and ENAP carry over will remain high into the foreseeable future.

CNMI is currently considering, with FNS technical assistance, modifications to the ENAP intended to expand participation. Primary among the changes are further increases to income eligibility and benefit levels as well as additional ENAP promotion. They are hopeful to achieve an approximately 45 percent increase in participation during second half of FY 2018 with further increases planned for FY 2019. Under this scenario, current funding would support the ENAP through at least FY 2021 and potentially into FY 2022. If lower levels of participation are achieved, current funding could potentially support the ENAP into FY 2023 or FY 2024. CNMI's ENAP plan provides for an orderly transition back to operating parameters of the base NAP grant as ENAP grant funds are exhausted.